CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEASHORE.

The seashore, where the first Irishmen picked up a living some thousands of years ago, still plays a significant role in the islands and around the coasts and is laid under contribution for seaweed and drift weed (wrack), for sand and gravel, and for accessory supplies of food. On many an Irish strand too, seasonal festivals, horse-racing and country games have only slowly given way to holiday makers from the city. Communal rights in the seashore were jealously guarded, and one constantly comes across ancient customs that have survived in this most changeless of environments. I recall the countryman " on the brew " (bureau ; that is, on the dole) whom I watched in County Down twisting on his bare thigh, his palm dried with a dusting of wood-ash from the hearth, the two-ply " crop " of horse-hair for his fishing line—each ply consisting of twenty-one strands taken from the tail of a white mare. This method of twisting is found amongst almost all primitive peoples, and can be paralleled, for instance, from the remote Andaman Islands. His outfit for codling fishing is illustrated in Fig. 94, which shows two hair crops attached to a home-made sinker of lead—called from its shape a " frog " ; the use of horse-hair has survived in this case because it is stiffer than gut and serves to keep the hooks from fouling each other. Rock-fishing lines in Co. Antrim are sometimes made of black horse-hair, but for the part next the hook, called the foot-line, white hair is used. Well-made lines of carefully selected hair

22 [283] 227 226 [237]

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 144—ANALYST]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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226 227 are said to last a lifetime. I have seen such lines twisted between the palms of the hand and also made by spinning round a cap to which the two loose ends are pinned. In County Galway similar foot-lines are made of mixed horse and

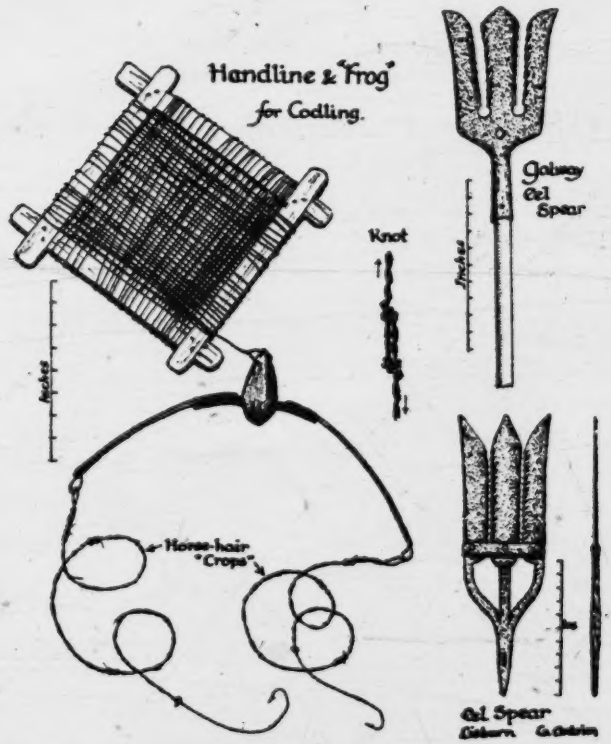

Fig. 94.

[2847] [827] cow hair. The short lengths of hair cord are tied with a special knot (Fig. 94) which is " set " with saliva. Horse-hair cords were formerly used to fasten together the curragh framework in Donegal.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

● 226 Hazel sticks are often used as fishing rods, but the sea itself may cast up gifts in the shape of bamboo poles. In a general way each species of fish must be tempted with its appropriate bait or lure in its proper season, and when the varied traditions and fish of different stretches of coast are recalled it will be realized that a vast amount of information could be collected on this topic. The bait necessary for bottom fishing—mussels, limpets, "slaters," "buckies," crab, lug-worm and so on—is different from that used in 'streaming"—young eels, small fish, or artificial lures in the form of white feathers or hair.

Then there are the different methods employed in attaching the bait, in throwing the lines or using the rod both in rock and boat fishing. In Strangford Lough, County Down, for example, the rod is plunged deep into the water from the stern of the rowing-boat, the swirl of the current helping to agitate the streaming bait. An ingenious device found on the west coast is the "protected hook" used for fishing amongst sea-weeds: to prevent the fouling of the hook a shield made of the carapace of a crab is attached to the line. The stone sinker is made from a pebble by chipping out two notches to hold the line. Nor should we fail to mention that "the best hooks in the world" were formerly made at Limerick: the name is still attached to the graded hooks one buys in seaside towns.

In the north of Ireland the fish most commonly caught from the rocks or from small boats inshore is the dark coal-fish, variously called, according to its age and size, cudden or gelpin, pickock or pickies, glashan or blockan, grey lord, [251] stanlock, black jack, and so on. Lightly salted, the split blockan may be seen drying on the thatched roofs of houses along many a stretch of coast. A close rival in popularity and abundance is the pollack or "lythe." Ling, one of our oldest foods, is still, like the salted herring which go so well [251] with potatoes, a favourite in rural Ireland. They used to be dried beside the kelp kilns down the west coast. These

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

226 larger fish, including cod and skate, are generally caught on "long lines," hung with hundreds of hooks, in deeper water. The antiquity of some such method of fishing is suggested by the discovery of cod bones with the remains of our raised beach cultures. Old fashioned devices are found in long-line fishing, too: floats of inflated dog skin ("stookies") and sinkers of grooved stone (Fig. 95) are in daily use.

[227]

Fig. 95.

804 The illustration also shows a grooved stone resembling the type well known to archæologists as grooved hammer-stones. This example was employed as a 10 lb. weight for weighing wool. I have seen similar stones kept for weighing butter and kelp.

227 The line baskets present interesting variations of shape: I illustrate (Fig. 76) examples from Co. Antrim and from Co. Galway. The long Aran basket has a raised end, while the Waterford pattern is a short shallow basket. Types of net

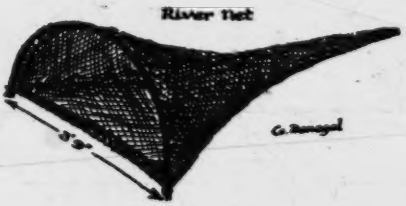

Fig. 96.

for inshore fishing, including salmon nets, differ considerably from place to place and need study. Mention should also be made of the "otter," better known from its adoption in mine-sweeping as the paravane, which is widely used for

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

We referred in the first paragraph to sand and gravel: the white shell sand is taken for manure and is also strewn on the kitchen floor, while beach stones and gravel find many uses as cobble stones, pebble-dashing and so on. Among other by-products of the sea we must not forget fish-oil, manufactured not only as a medicine for cattle but also as an illuminant. The iron crusie lamp (Fig. 105) was not long since the chief source of light in the islands, and until half a century ago large sea-shells are said to have been employed for the purpose in Co. Kerry. The wick of the crusie was a peeled rush or a twist of cotton: because of the strong smell the lamp was hung under the chimney so that the draught carried away the fumes. The abundant sea shells are also utilized for lime on some islands, for example Tory, by burning them in a kiln made of turf.

Fig. 105. Length 15"

Finally, we must not omit the dread harvest of the sea cast up after storms—the timber and food-stuffs and wreckage—always welcome and perhaps in olden days not uninvited. Many an islandman's cabin is roofed with couples of ships' masts, and a visit to treeless Tory or Rathlin will reveal the many uses to which drift timber is put. Mysterious objects brought by the currents from the West Indies occasionally turn up: pumice, perhaps from this source, has been found, treasured no doubt as a magic stone, in sandhill settlements of 4,000 years ago.

It is not to be wondered at, when we consider the ancient and varied, if often toilsome and dangerous life of the Irish shores, that the coasts carry a much denser population than districts inland. It should be stressed that these various activities are carried on not as a rule by specialized fishermen but by farmers and peasants to whom the sea offers an accessory source of life and interest, and who often perpetuate the old communal schemes by taking shares in a boat and nets. Old ways die hardest by the sea; prohibitions and superstitions are rife, and fishing is one of the few occupations in which women take no active part.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

on this subject, I shall not attempt the treatment of it myself, but shall quote the opinion of the Rev. Eugene O'Growney, who has an exceptional knowledge of both people and language, and has kindly furnished me with some of his notes relating to them. He says:—"The Irish spoken in Boffin has a very poor vocabulary, as far as I heard it spoken. I must say, however, that it was not easy to get the people to speak it, and many children at first refused point blank to utter a word of Irish. In most of the Irish-speaking districts of the west, the people have preserved a number of old poetic prayers and hymns. Many of these are very beautiful, and some appear to be of great age. I was particularly interested at the time of my visit in these hymns, but was told that the only hymn in use in Boffin and Shark was the *ortha Mhuire*, or prayer of Mary. I could not find any person in Boffin who could recite it, and the only person in Shark who was supposed to have it in full was out at sea. An old man in Boffin recited for me a portion of a quaint old religious composition in English." In another place he states that the people speak neither English nor Irish well, their dialect of the language containing many corrupted English words, and at least one curious word. "I recollect that the cove in which St. Leo's well is situated is called *fuath Leo*. I take the word *fuath*, which is the usual word in Inishshark and Inisboffin for a 'cove,' to be a corruption of *uamh*, which is used by the Four Masters in the year 893 as meaning 'cave.'"[1]

19 [538]

IV. Sociology.

1. *Occupations.*—Every family combines fishing and farming, and has some share in a boat. The farms are small (see p. 340), about three acres and a-half under potatoes and oats, being about the average amount of tillage per family. All are held direct from the landlord, who resides on Inishbofin, there being no subletting or con-acre. The rents average about £2 per holding, but vary much according to the extent and quality of the land.

241 [226] 427

The holdings are not divided up into small fields, as in Aran, but are often insufficiently fenced, allowing the cattle to stray, which

241 423

[1] The Rev. E. A. Lavelle has, since the above was written, sent a translation of a curious old Irish litany used on both islands, both in Irish and English, which he obtained from an old man, aged 84, whose father, Peter Lavelle, fought under Nelson at Trafalgar. As the litany is in English and of great length, it is not inserted here, but it is to be hoped that the Irish form will be recorded and preserved as it may possess the linguistic value wanting in a translation.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

but a few years ago the ordinary means of lighting the houses was a rude open lamp, filled with oil extracted from the livers of fish, and having a piece of peeled rush for a wick. 373

Kelp-burning was formerly one of the industries of the islands, but of late years it declined rapidly, and is now practically extinct. As to the cause of this decay of a formerly profitable source of income, very different accounts are given, some alleging the poor quality of the weed; others that they were not fairly treated in selling; and others again that it does not pay as well as the fish-curing. 381

The fish most taken are sea-bream, glassan (a sort of pollock), mackerel, turbot, and plaice, used mostly for home consumption; cod and ling, which are cured at the fish-curing station for exportation, and oil extracted from their livers; also large quantities of crabs and lobsters, which are taken to Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, from which they are forwarded to the English market. The boat used for conveying them is of peculiar construction, and has a large salt-water tank amidships, in which the lobsters are kept alive. The lobster-pots are of the usual type. There is nothing unusual about their ordinary method of fishing, except that the Inishbofin men, as mentioned in a footnote to the account of that island in the Memoir of the Geological Survey, already alluded to, do not follow the shoals of fish around the western headland, but carry their boats across the narrow isthmus in which Lough Bofin is situated. 226 439 [501] [502]

The pursuit of the "sun-fish," or basking-shark (*Selache maxima*), was formerly a source of considerable profit to the islanders, but has been almost altogether abandoned of late years owing to the decline in the price of the oil, and partly, it is said, to the loss of several lives on one occasion when a boat was charged and overturned by a wounded fish, also to the partial disappearance for some years of the sharks. 226

The season for this enterprise is from April until the end of June, and in that time large numbers of these fish were taken formerly, and some are still killed from time to time. Mr. G. H. Kinahan, to whom I am indebted for several notes relative to the condition of the islands some years ago, says:—"The sun-fish fishing was considerable in my time (1870). I have seen strings of seven and nine fish; when caught, they towed them into the harbour, cut out the liver, and left the carcass to rot, or be eaten by the pigs; the stench in the harbour was something to remember." A very full description of the fishing is given by Sir H. W. Gore-Booth in a recent article. He states that the value of the oil (from eight to twelve petroleum barrels full) obtained from the liver of one of these fish has been variously estimated

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

226 to him by old fishermen at from £30 to £100, so that the loss of this industry must have told considerably on a poor community such as this. The primitive method which he found in use on his visit to the islands he describes in full as it was explained by Michael Halloran, the 'king'[1] of Inishshark, a veteran harpooner, who had just killed his nineteenth fish a few days before.

"I had been told that these sun-fish generally took from sixteen to eighteen hours, and frequently longer, to kill; in fact, I have heard it sometimes took two days, so naturally felt considerable interest in the gear used for the purpose. The king brought with him his trusty harpoon, which, to my mind, looked a most antiquated arrangement, especially designed to cut out of a fish, instead of holding it. I could not see a whale-boat or anything like one, so inquired where the boat was, and was shown an ordinary square-sterned boat, about 16 feet in the keel, which had nailed on her starboard bow a piece of wood about 1 foot long, with three small notches, or scores, barely half an inch deep, cut in it. I found out that these notches or scores were all they had to run the line through, and that when a boat fastened a fish, it was a pulling match between our friend the shark on one hand, and sixteen men on the other, a regular case of 'pull devil, pull baker'! Such a thing as a bollard head to take a turn of the line round seems never to have entered their heads."

226 501

In addition to fishing and farming, the other occupations are fish-curing at the station recently established by the landlord, Cyril Allies, Esq., J.P., who resides on the island, and personally superintends it, and the trades, represented by a boat-builder, a blacksmith, a shoemaker who imports his leather from the mainland, a tailor, who still adheres to the old method of measuring his clients without a tape, using instead a sheet of paper, on which the several lengths are recorded by "snips," or notches cut with the scissors; there is one weaver who makes use of a rather archaic form of hand-loom, four men who, on occasion, act as sawyers, extemporising a saw-pit in the nearest convenient spot by the aid of trestles, and using to mark their lines a cord blackened with the ashes of straw or shavings, and finally, a fiddler.

463

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[622] [1] In answer to an inquiry of mine relative to the position of king, Mr. Myles Joyce, National Teacher of Bofin, writes:—"The title of king is not hereditary in the island. There is at present a man removed something beyond his neighbours in the way of education and position, who is, *par excellence*, the king; and to whom all persons who want any information about the island or its history must apply."

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

241 The manures used are mainly sea-weed and farmyard manure. In the mountains the practice of burning the land is common.

231 The pasture is fairly good, but the cattle and sheep are inferior, though efforts are now being made to improve the breeds.

An average family has a couple of pigs, a cow or two and some sheep, a large number of fowl, geese and ducks, and a donkey or horse.

372 The fuel used is turf obtained from the bogs, which are extensive, except in the southern part of the Mullet; and the islands which have now no turf of their own import from Achill or Ballycroy.

381 A very considerable quantity of kelp is made, on which, in the Mullet, a royalty is charged by the landlord. About Portacloy there is no royalty paid.

226 Fishing employs many of the men, though until lately the fish taken was merely for home use. The kinds usually caught are turbot, mackerel, ling, cod, and herrings; all of these, except the turbot, are now cured at the fishing stations established at several parts of the coast by the government. For home consumption, much [251] is eaten fresh, but a good deal of it is roughly salted for winter use.

Lobsters are mostly taken by the men of Inishkea, and by a couple of boats at Portacloy. The Inishkea men, while at this [342] fishing, mostly live in very primitive huts on Inisglora, where they stay away from their families for six weeks or two months at a time. [435] The lobsters are sold in Belmullet for about five shillings per dozen, and are sent by car to Ballina and thence to England. The lobster pots are mostly of home manufacture.

The fishery stations mentioned above now afford employment to many who formerly had no means of disposing of their surplus time and fish.

439 Large quantities of eggs are exported from this district, Belmullet being the largest egg exporting centre in Ireland. They are brought 235 into the town by the country people and sold to dealers, who, when they have collected a sufficient quantity, send them on to Ballina, whence they are sent to England. Butter is also exported in the [234] summer and autumn.

273 Illicit distilling is carried on to some extent in this district, though not at all so prevalent as formerly. The stills are made in the people's homes by travelling tinkers who live with the family until the job is finished.

286 A good deal of homespun is made, but the dyes are not obtained

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

222 461 described as a gathering of the whole people, a time of feasting and festivals and courting. That there was magic as well as manure in the golden weed is apparent from the urge to possess some share, however small, of the harvest. In the kingdom of Mourne 'men would walk three miles to be present at the division of the wrack and were content to take back a single creelful [482] on their backs. They would gather the bits of wrack on their knees, scraping them up with their hands as though it was gold dust.'[1] Here the division was by lot following a given signal—in one case a bush hoisted on a tall pole—for the farmers concerned to assemble. Wrack rights and ways of access are sometimes still bitterly fought over though they now have little meaning.

● 226 Spring was also the season for gathering other gifts of the sea, the shellfish and the shell sand which was carted inland [492] and even taken on horseback for distances of up to thirty miles. Prized because 'it cut up the clay', it also provided much needed [241] lime for acid soils. In South Donegal boatloads of mussels used to be scraped off the rocks with spades and distributed in creels for spreading on the potato ridges. In Dundalk Bay, Mr. H. G. Tempest tells me, mussels for the table and for bait are scraped up from boats with long-handled rakes (Fig. 74). Easter and Good Friday in particular were times for visiting the shore. Of the now deserted Blasket Islands Thomas O'Crohan writes: 'it has always been the custom here to go and get kitchen from the strand to eat on Good Friday.'[2] Winkles (willucks) were the favourite food on these occasions, but after St. Patrick's Day, they say, limpets are better eating than winkles. Shellfish were boiled in milk to give food for children and for calves. Sandeels were pulled up with a bent iron rod or a blunted sickle: in Mayo 'they are taken on moonlit nights by considerable [517] gatherings of young people, the object being as much the amusement as the sandeels'.[3] In Donegal 'for scallops and oysters, [462] when the tide was out, the young women waded into the sea, some of them naked, and by armfuls brought them to the shore.'[4]

[1]E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 144.
[2]T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 29.
[3]C. R. Browne, *Ballycroy*.
[4]A. B., *The Rosses in 1763*, 201.

[Text continues on p. 226]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

226 [415] [386] Scallop shells were put to many uses and were often a substitute for the iron oil-pan of the open-wicked crusie. Seashells were also burnt to make lime for whitewashing the houses.

[262] In late summer the sprat come ashore in vast numbers on the west and south coasts, so that in Donegal 'they constituted the chief food of the peasantry during three or four months of the year.'[1] They were taken from the water in buckets and sieves, and the mackerel pursuing their prey close against the rocks might be caught almost as easily. In Waterford harbour there were specially erected wickerwork head weirs to take the sprat; and Dr. Went has described a wattled sprat-weir in working order in the estuary of the Blackwater.[2] Fishing from the rocks, too, is most popular in harvest time and though now little more than a pastime it once provided a reserve of food for the winter. About hay-harvest the ballan wrasse is at its best, 'when the flags (wild iris) are in bloom', they say. Known as bavin, byan, morran and by other names, it is now despised nearly everywhere, as is the coalfish which was salted and dried [192] and which has different names in Gaelic for every stage of its growth to demonstrate its former importance and popularity. 'Glassan' oil was the luminant for the crusie lamps in Rathlin Island. On the north coast you may see anglers 'frassing' for small coalfish, that is attracting them by spitting into the water chewed potatoes or limpets. Formerly ground bait was made [412] by pounding limpets in rock basins of the type known as 'bullauns' (Fig. 90). Occasionally you may come across a fisherman casting a feather lure for pollack with a line made wholly or in part of horsehair. One method of twisting these lines, with quills, will be described in the following chapter. For short lengths next the hook—the fine foot-lines—white hair is preferred, and I have seen it made in County Down by [283] twisting the hair between the bare thigh and a hand dusted with wood ash, a method practised by 'primitives' in many parts of the world. Two strands of from fifteen to twenty hairs are twisted on each other. (The anglers in the Seine at Paris are also said to prefer a 'crop' made from a grey mare's tail.) To

[1] 'Kinnfaela', *The Cliff Scenery of South-Western Donegal*, 19.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *Antiquity*, 25 (1951), 32-35.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

watch rock-fishing from the great limestone cliffs of the Aran Islands is a memorable sight, the 300 foot line being flung out weighted with a large grooved stone. 226 ●

Inshore net fishing, which will be considered in the next chapter, has probably taken the place of other methods of catching fish close to the land. In some river estuaries and across the mouths of little streams in many shallow bays curving lines of boulders are all that is left of fishing weirs in which salmon and flatfish were once trapped (Fig. 75). I first noticed an example in Belfast Lough some years ago, and later came across a seventeenth century reference to their occurrence in Strangford Lough. The 'wares and fishyards' are described as being built of loose stones which allowed the tide to flow through, and fish seeking food from the fresh water were carried over the weir at the flood to be trapped as the tide ebbed. They were then netted or speared. The weirs were said to have decayed 'since fish days were neglected',[1] but the remains of many of them can still be seen around the lough. Such 'tidal fishing engines', to judge from their world-wide distribution, are an extremely ancient fishing device. More elaborate are the V-shaped wickerwork weirs of which Dr. A. E. J. Went has made an historical study.[2] One or two are still worked but they became obsolete over a century ago when the Scotch stake net was introduced for salmon fishing, and they were later condemned as obstacles to navigation. In Waterford harbour alone no less than forty-four were destroyed. These head weirs were operated by holding a conical net below a platform which crossed an opening placed at the apex of the V. Large weirs of this kind required considerable capital to keep in repair and were owned by the privileged classes but they have no doubt

[1]E. E. Evans, *U.J.A.*, 14 (1951), 48.

[2]A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 76 (1946), 176–94; 78 (1948), 1–4. Professor C. M. Yonge (*The Times*, 10th November 1955), in an article on the mussel industry of La Rochelle in the Bay of Biscay, attributes it to a resourceful Irishman, Patrick Walton, who is said to have been wrecked there in the year 1235. He is given credit for erecting a tidal head weir which also served as a *bouchot* or mussel bed, and for devising a net for catching sea-birds and a narrow plank-boat pushed by one leg over the soft mud. 'The French naturalist, Quatrefages, writing about 1850, reported that a direct descendant of Walton was then engaged in mussel culture and took a natural pride in the name he bore.' No doubt Patrick Walton derived some of his ingenious ideas from his native land.

[177]

227 [Text continues on p. 229]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

developed from wicker constructions which, like the stone weirs, were once built by shore dwellers for their own needs. But weirs were not the only structure built in tidal waters. The inquiring visitor will observe along many stretches of coast straight lines of stones running out to sea which are the remains of little piers alongside which small boats could lie. Back of them beyond the reach of the tide there may be the ruins of a boat shelter which might never have been more than a rectangular pen of stone walls or earth banks. Such pens are still used to protect the curraghs of the west coast from the wind which is their worst enemy.[1] The vessels are in addition weighted down with stones (Fig. 75), and to this end the gunwales often project at the rear of the curraghs to give purchase for the boulders (Fig. 78).

On the lonely and now abandoned island of St. Kilda the portion which a woman took to her husband on marriage is said to have been 'a pound of horsehair to make a gin to catch fowls'.[2] Martin Martin in his account of the island also tells us that the 200 inhabitants yearly killed and preserved above 20,000 birds, and in addition prodigious numbers of seabirds' eggs were consumed. The killing of seabirds and the taking of eggs for export to England during the worst period of food shortage in the second world war brought about a temporary revival of old skills on many parts of the Irish coast. Down to times still remembered fowling was a seasonal activity on most of the islands where seabirds assemble to nest. Birds of the auk family were caught in horsehair 'dulls' (snares) pegged to the ground. For other birds such as rock pigeons the snares were baited. July was the busy month, and the birds not eaten in this 'hungry month' were salted down for the winter. On Rathlin Island the cliffs and sea-slopes were apportioned in strips and demarcated by spikes driven into the rocks. It is remembered that single men in search of eggs would let themselves alone down ropes attached to iron pins in the cliff edge. Traditions of other ways of catching the birds have been lost but one may be fairly sure that the various methods described by Martin Martin and more recently by Kenneth Williamson for the

[1] S. Piggott, *Antiquity*, 28 (1954), 19–24.
[2] Martin Martin, *The Western Isles*, 317.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Faeroe Islands[1] were practised in a region which has so many culture parallels with the northern isles.

Down to recent times coast-dwellers also took their toll of seals and porpoises. 'We thought more of a seal in those days', wrote Thomas O'Crohan of the Blaskets, 'than of the very best pig.'[2] They were valued too for their skins, which as we have mentioned made covers for the curraghs and shoes for the rock-climbers. Seal hunting was dangerous work, sometimes involving swimming into the underwater caves where they breed. The seal catchers in County Cork wore 'bags quilted with charcoal' on their arms, for the animals let go their hold when they bit on the crunching charcoal.[3] In the Blaskets porpoises were slaughtered after being driven ashore by boats, and then 'everyone was crimson with the blood of the sea-pigs'.[4] The meat was salted down.

Crabs and lobsters, like so many other seafoods, are now neglected and even despised, though there are commercial fisheries in areas accessible to markets. Apart from creel fishing they were formerly taken from the rock holes where they lie, either by hand or with an iron hook. In County Kerry one man would hold another under the water with an oar while he searched the holes. The old-style pots or creels are circular, with a flat weighted bottom, sometimes hinged: the principle rods are of hazel or even whin, the woven sides of sally, laurel or heather stems. They vary in pattern from one district to another, as do the round-topped rectangular net-creels which have taken their place almost everywhere (Fig. 76). The lobstermen are a hardy breed, many of them having turned from long-line fishing, and they have kept up the feuds and rivalries to which the long-liners were addicted. In both types of fishing the search for bait is an exacting occupation. I illustrate a special fork used for digging lug worms, and also a mussel rake (Fig. 74).

If it is difficult to obtain information about the history of such tools and activities as these, which have been the concern

[1] K. Williamson, *The Atlantic Islands*, ch. 6. [Text continues on p. 232]
[2] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 99.
[3] E. Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, 2, 127.
[4] T. O'Crohan, op. cit., 12.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

XVII

BOATS AND FISHING

THE lower reaches of the River Boyne, celebrated among archaeologists as the setting of one of the most remarkable groups of chamber tombs in western Europe, have another claim on our interests as the last refuge of a venerable craft. This is perhaps the only place in Europe where the phrase 'the skin of a boat' preserves its literal meaning. The lath or wicker-work coracle is known on several of the Welsh rivers, but only in the Boyne curragh (Ir. *currach*) is the covering still made of hide. The ox-hides now used are imported: the one I examined during a recent visit to the salmon fisheries near Drogheda had been tanned by a specialist in the dressing of beaver skins. Each hide may outlast several 'baskets' or boat-frames, for these quickly rot with repeated wettings and dryings, and on the average two frames of doubled hazel wands are required each season, which lasts from 12th February to 12th August. A few other Irish rivers kept their curraghs into recent centuries—the curragh was certainly known on the Shannon and the Erne and possibly on the Bann—but on most of the inland waters dug-outs seem to have been traditional, and if we knew more about the two distributions important cultural inferences might be drawn. Dug-outs have been found, however, in nearly every part of the country, including the River Boyne.

The curragh is not likely to survive much longer and its lore should be fully recorded. Netting salmon in fresh water on all Irish rivers has been illegal since 1st January 1948, so that the curragh's last legal refuge is the tidal portion of the Boyne. But it has been long a-dying. I was told that no more would be made after the death of that fine craftsman Michael O'Brien

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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net. Sitting on the thwart, the boat-builder now drives in the projecting rod-ends to tighten the skin, and trims them to within an inch of the gunwale. Finally he weaves on a protecting mouth of hazel rods which he binds to the gunwale and covers, behind the thwart, with canvas to save the net from damage as it is played out.

The curragh was well adapted to the draft-net salmon fishery at the Oldbridge weir on the Boyne. The following account is based on notes made at Oldbridge in 1947: 'Every half hour of daylight during the season, the curragh makes its brief trip with a draft-net around the pool of water where the salmon lie below the weir. Its virtue lies in its lightness and ease of handling—though not for the novice—in the method of paddling over the bows which allows it to keep close to the banks, and especially in the shallow draught which enables it to pass right under the weir without being swept down by the under-current. The paddler kneels in the deep bows and draws the boat along with rapid strokes alternately to left and right. The net-man sits on the thwart facing backwards and plays out the net, the end of which is held by a third man on the bank. Having reached the far end of the weir the paddler races downstream and returns across the current to join the third man and close the net. The salmon are dispatched with a heavy 'priest' here called the killing-stick.' The fishermen still operate two rectangular fishtraps below the weir, one near each bank, composed of iron gratings which have probably replaced wicker traps since they are known as 'hurdles'. The salmon are taken out with a landing net. A weir has probably been worked continuously at this spot since the Middle Ages, for the monks of Mellifont Abbey operated a weir here.[1]

It comes as a shock, after seeing the little basket-curragh of the Boyne, to recall that the legendary histories tell of much trafficking across the seas in splendid curraghs which carried sails. *The Voyage of Teigue* was made in a curragh constructed of forty oxhides and fitted with twenty-five thwarts.[2] Allowance must be made for picturesque exaggeration, but there is no doubt that the monks of the Irish Church went far afield in

[1] A. E. J. Went, *Co. Louth Arch. Journ.*, 13 (1953), 18–33.
[2] Standish O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* (1892), 386.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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where curraghs were formerly known. But it is also characteristic of Scottish cobles and the boats of some English lakes. The inshore fishing boats of Co. Antrim also had booled oars,[1] and farther afield the single tholepin is said to typify the rowing boats of Madeira, the sardine boats of Portugal and some vessels of the Upper Nile. These often use a grommet, as do the boats of the north-east coast of England.

Sea-going curraghs are put to many uses, for inshore net fishing, for setting lobster pots or long lines, for gathering kelp and for carrying freight, livestock and passengers. But the most spectacular purpose to which they have been put is for hunting the basking shark or sunfish from whose liver, before the advent of paraffin, oil for lighting was obtained. A single fish will yield from seven to ten barrels of liver. Measuring up to forty feet in length, the basking shark is one of the world's largest fish and though harmless—its diet is minute copepods—its bulk makes it a formidable adversary. These fish move down the west coast in summer, and in early May they haunt the Sunfish Bank thirty miles off Achill Island, where they come to the surface in the morning and evening. The bank is remarkable for the break of the tide on it, although it lies between seventy and ninety fathoms near the edge of 'soundings'—the continental shelf—and a heavy swell makes conditions difficult for small boats. Here and elsewhere the sunfish used to be harpooned from curraghs, but the advantage lay with decked vessels which could stand by for several days. In the early nineteenth century as many as thirty or forty fish were sometimes killed on the Sunfish Bank in a single day of fine weather. Nowadays the sharks are taken in strong nets fixed to island headlands around which they swim. They are occasionally seen off the other Irish coasts, where they cause great havoc if they get involved in the fishing nets.

Of the small open clinker-built boats of traditional type which takes the place of the curragh on the north, east and south coasts, no systematic study has been made. Some of them betray their Norse inheritance in their lines or their names, for example the Wicklow skiff and the drontheim (Trondhjem) of the north coast. These boats are double-ended—unlike the cur-

[1] S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 276.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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501 of the River Nure were described as 'flat narrow boats equal at both ends and propelled by paddles'.[1] Earlier, about 1645, Gerard Boate described the cots as 'things like boats, but very unshapely, being nothing but square pieces of timber made hollow.' 'They are very common throughout all Ireland . . . even upon the great rivers and loughs'.[2]

[491] To judge from the numerous discoveries of small dug-outs at river crossings their last surviving use was for ferrying purposes. They were replaced locally by flat-bottomed cots built with wide planks laid edge to edge, such as serve the eel-fishers of the River Bann. These are propelled with a pole. The punt-like cot is also the old craft of the River Shannon. A number of dug-outs are found to have been adapted for propulsion with oars, using the single thole-pin of the rowing-curragh. The large rowing boats of Lough Neagh also use the single thole-pin: to give greater leverage for the heavy oars the iron thole-pin is set out from the gunwale on an outrigger or 'bolster'. In the cots of Lough Erne the oar is worked between double thole-pins (Fig. 78). The maze of lakes which make up the Lough Erne group have yielded many ancient dug-outs of varied types, some of them spoon-shaped, others rectangular and provided with carrying lugs. Others again seem to be both boat and sledge, an alternative to the portable curragh in a land strewn with little lakes. But the strangest vessel, apparently misnamed a curragh, was a kind of raft which is said to have survived until a hundred years ago, 'composed of wreaths of bull-rushes tied upon a frame or raft made of rough branches of trees'.[3]

● 226 Methods of fishing in river and lake include not only legitimate forms of angling and netting, but many ways of killing fish which game laws and other vested interests have made illegal, but have not extinguished. The spearing of salmon, prohibited since 1714, is now left to poachers, but well into the last century it was openly practised in the city of Galway.[4] On

[423] Lough Neagh yellow (feeding) eels are caught illicitly on long lines by fisherfolk whose claims to ancient rights have not been recognized by the courts.

[1] W. Tighe, *Statistical Observations, County of Kilkenny*, 150.
[2] G. Boate, *Ireland's Natural History*, 64, 136.
[3] W. F. Wakeman, loc. cit.
[4] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 82 (1952), 110

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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000
been recognized by the courts. 'Bobbing' for eels with a ball of 226
worms attached to a string is practised on dark stormy nights, 227
and on the River Bann a vicious-looking eel-rake is used to jab among the river weeds. Its teeth of sharp steel, often discarded hackle-pins, are set an inch apart in the end of a long pole. Bone pins of prehistoric date recovered in quantities from the bed of the river may have been put to a similar use, and this method of catching fish, probably of ancient origin, is widely distributed. There are specimens of eel-rakes in the Danish [171]
museums (Fig. 79). A very similar eel-comb is known in China, and a herring rake, used by the native fishermen of north-western America and mounted with sharp bone teeth, was first described by Captain Cook in 1778.[1] For taking salmon, poachers in the River Barrow use a staked net fashioned into a conical trap, and trout are taken in the north of Ireland in home-made 'loop nets' large enough to bridge small streams (Fig. 80). Salmon are also 'strokehauled' with naked hooks, and gaffed when within reach of the river banks. Trout are taken not only by 'ginling' (tickling) but also with a 'dull' or horsehair noose.

Dr. Went has made a careful study of Irish fish spears and 227
the interested reader may be referred to his paper.[2] It may be mentioned that two of the three classes of eel-spears which he describes have been recovered from crannogs of the Dark Ages: they are the barbed spears known as rock- or sun-spears, so named from the conditions which are required for the eels to be impaled, and the more common mud-spears, which are within the law and of which excellent specimens can still be seen in parts of the country. They have flat tines, notched at the sides to prevent the enmeshed eels escaping. Spears of this type are plunged blindly into the mud. Consequently they are often very large and heavy, a seven-pronged example from the River Bann weighing over nine pounds and having a handle 30 feet long. Old specimens have a circular aperture at the junction of each pair of tines which facilitated the removal of the eels. The advantage of the mud-spear, which has a much wider distribution than the primitive looking rock-spear (which is apparently

[1] *Captain Cook's Third Voyage*, Ed. C. R. Low (N.D.), 395.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 82 (1952), 109–34.

 [Text continues on 246]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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227 confined to Co. Westmeath) is that the eel was undamaged and its skin could therefore be utilized. Apart from their use as [237] thongs and flail-hangings eel-skins were worn as charms against [751] rheumatic pains. Eel fat, too, is esteemed as a cure for rheuma- [757] tism. The third type of eel-spear is quite different in form and methods of use. It is confined to Wexford Harbour and would appear to be a relic of Scandinavian influence in that half-foreign south-eastern corner of Ireland comprising the baronies of Bargy and Forth. It consists of two splayed prongs between which is ingeniously mounted a single barbed prong on to which 227 the eel is guided by the outer members (Fig. 79). When the ● 226 tide covers the mudflats the fisherman lies in a punt with his head over the prow, and with a spear in each hand propels the boat until he spies an eel in the mud, when his punting pole becomes a weapon. At low tide the eel fishers wear yard-long [481] 'scooches' or mud-shoes, wooden boards turned up at the front like miniature skis. We note in passing that boards were formerly worn by both men and horses in working on soft bogs in Co. Mayo.[1]

The salmon spear or leister, being illegal, is normally a light three-pronged instrument, but large specimens weighing up to eight pounds and made after the fashion of the Westmeath eel-spears are found on the River Suir (Fig. 80). The fish were attracted at night by 'burning the river' with resinous splits of bog-fir or lumps of peat soaked in oil.

Riverine weirs of many kinds have been the privilege of religious houses and landed properties through the ages, and many examples specially designed for the capture of migratory fish, salmon and eels are maintained. There are traditions of temporary weirs of heather stems weighted down with stones, into which trout were driven to be extracted when the bundles of heather were pitched on to the bank. Gerard Boate describes the weirs in his day as consisting of 'big stones set close together from the one side of the river to the other, leaving only one hole . . . before which hole a basket being laid, they take 227 therein a great quantity of fish'.[2] 'Fish baskets' and 'weels' are referred to in many ancient fishing grants, but I have not

[1] J. McParlan, *Mayo*, 94.
[2] Gerard Boate, *Ireland's Natural History*, 70.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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262 sold fresh in the markets of the Bann Valley, and were salted down for winter use in place of herrings.[1] They have gone the way of most of the pre-famine 'relishes' which came to be despised as the threat of famine faded after the middle of last century. The elvers, too, used to be taken out of the teeming rivers in spring with sieves and pressed into cakes or boiled in milk and made into a kind of eel-cheese. In the River Bann the 226 elvers are now trapped at the first weir, at the tidal limit, and transported upstream, up to 80 million a year being given an easy passage in this way. A marked reduction in the size of the silver eels netted on their return to the sea some ten years later has been interpreted as a result of this interference with nature. The bulk of the eels taken are sold live in the London markets. [231] In addition to elvers salmon fry also was in former times taken for food and fed to pigs, and by an Act of Elizabeth's reign swine were prohibited from feeding on the shores of tidal rivers 'where they destroy a great quantity of salmon and eel fry'.[2]

Many traditional methods of fishing survive on the lakes of the Irish midlands. The otter board, now more often seen along the coast where fishermen trawl for flat fish in sandy bays, was formerly widely used in lake fishing and is considered to be 'an implement of very ancient origin in Ireland'.[3] Related to it is the 'pooka', a board fitted with mast and sail which carried out the baited long lines.[4] Fishing lines were until recently 283 sometimes made of horsehair by an interesting and undoubtedly ancient method. The instruments employed are goose or swan quills, cut down to make open-ended tubes some three inches long, two or three being needed according to whether a two- or three-strand line is being prepared. From ten to twenty long hairs taken from a horse's tail are threaded through each quill and knotted together at one end, the other ends of the quills being plugged with short pieces of quill which grip the hairs yet allow them to slide through. The quills are now rolled one against the other in the fingers, and as the strands twist on one another they pull down the hairs which feed them. The

[1] G. V. Sampson, *Memoir*, 248.
[2] W. Tighe, *Statistical Observations, County of Kilkenny*, 108.
[3] C. R. Browne, *Ballycroy*. See also R. U. Sayce, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 53 (1954).
[4] W. H. Maxwell, *Wild Sports of the West*, 77.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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line grows as if by magic as the quills rotate in nimble fingers. A fresh supply of hairs is inserted from time to time by removing the plugs. I illustrate an example of this fascinating apparatus made for me by Mr. T. J. Barron of Knockbride, Co. Cavan (Fig. 81). Mr. A. T. Lucas has described the Cavan

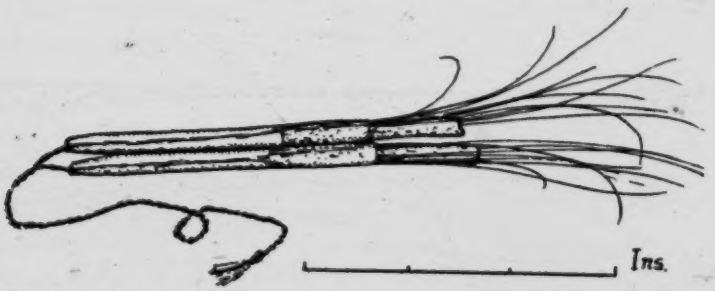

FIG. 81. Quills used for making horsehair fishing lines, Co. Cavan. The quills are rolled between the forefingers.

specimens and others from Co. Mayo.[1] In Cavan the lines were made for bream fishing: the bream were both split, salted and dried and stored fresh in little ponds on the lake shores. Around the coasts—I have seen examples from the Aran Islands and from Co. Down—a more complicated machine was made for twisting long lines of hemp, three spindles being rotated by pulling on an endless cord twisted round each spindle.[2] A very similar device is employed in China for making bamboo ropes for raising coal in primitive mines. On the shores of Lough Neagh the long lines are manufactured in rustic rope-walks. These night-lines, which have tended to replace draft-nets, are set in lengths of up to four miles. The season of yellow (feeding) eel fishing runs from March to October. It is illegal, as we have mentioned, but shows no signs of being given up. The eel fishermen claim immemorial rights and are not deterred by the fines imposed when they are caught. Their vocabulary, like that of the men who work the eel weirs on the River Bann, has many words which have come down from Gaelic and perhaps from

[1] A. T. Lucas, *Journal of the Galway Arch. and Hist. Soc.*, 24 (1951), 111–14.
[2] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, Fig. 63.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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pre-Gaelic tongues, and there can be little doubt that the eel fishery is prehistoric in origin. The draft nets in which pollan are caught in the lake—the pollan is a fresh-water herring peculiar to some Irish and Scottish lakes—also display old features. The sections, known as webs, are sewn together with a bone needle into long nets, which are weighted with stone sinkers. The draft-net is widely used in the salmon rivers, as described on the Boyne earlier in this chapter, and references to draft-netting go back to the twelfth century. On some rivers tall towers are erected from which a watcher signals the presence of fish.[1]

We are not here concerned with the commercial offshore fisheries, but something must be said of the inshore fishing because it has been characteristically combined with farming all around the coast. This type of fishing was well suited to the Irish crofter economy, so that the comment frequently made by improving visitors and despairing Government officials was that the Irish would not go out to fish, but waited for the fish to come close inshore. The shore-dwelling farmer is knowledgeable about the ways of fish and knows all 'the signs'. He has been accustomed to keep a net to hand and watch for shoals of different fish at the right seasons. There are watching points on the cliffs overlooking many a small bay, and it was from such vantage points on the south and west coasts that the pilchard 'huers' directed the seine boats to the shoals that visit Ireland intermittently.[2] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Irish pilchard fishery grew to large proportions but it has now declined to something like its older local significance. When the industry was capitalized by promoters like Sir William Petty it was the train oil pressed out during the packing of the pilchards for export which found an Irish market. It was used both as a luminant and in the preparation of leather. The seine boats have now turned their attention to herring and mackerel, and Dr. Went has pointed out that the seine is used for catching salmon only in Kenmare Bay, where Petty introduced it for pilchard fishing about the year 1672.

In the Irish Sea the herrings come close inshore in September

[1] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 85 (1955), 22–23, Pl. 3A.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 51 (1946), 137–57.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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and are therefore known as 'harvest herrings'. It is then that the yawls or skiffs which lie half hidden for most of the year have their brief spell of activity, and the farmers who jointly own them find on moonlight nights a cool relief from the hot pressure of harvest. The fish are caught in trammel nets, and they were formerly in great demand not only locally but for many miles inland for salting down as winter 'kitchen'.[1] A more varied diet has lessened the demand, for the great days of the salt herring were the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when a potato diet cried out for a tasty accompaniment. On the north-west coast the herring fishery extends through the winter, with consequent serious risks which the Donegal men have none the less been willing to take. Here, perhaps, is one explanation for the survival of the light rowing curragh down to the coming of powered vessels, for a small sail boat brings many hazards on this stormy Atlantic coast.

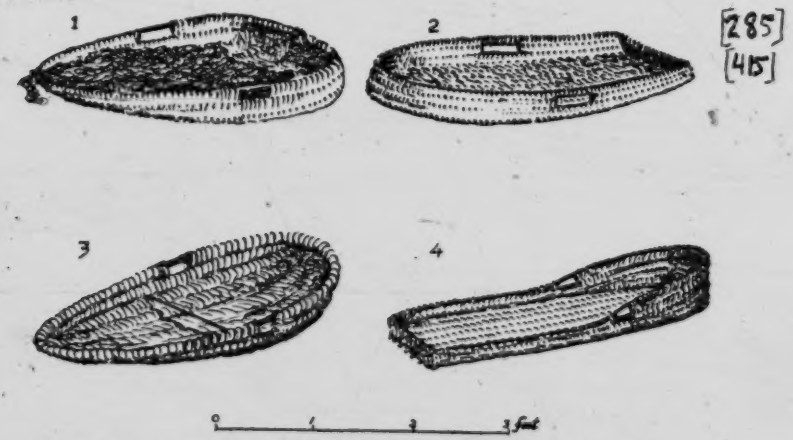

FIG. 82. Long-line baskets. (1) Co. Antrim. (2) Co. Galway. (3) Co. Down. (4) Aran Islands.

Long line fishing for cod, skate, ling and other big fish is almost certainly far older than the herring fishery, and it has preserved down to our own day many ancient practices and

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 18.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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226 types of gear. It used to be said that you should never risk taking a dog into some of the fishing villages on the north coast: [281] their skins were in great demand for making the line floats or 'stookies'. Very probably seal skins were formerly used for this purpose, as among the Eskimo. The sinkers of grooved stones from the beach might well pass for prehistoric implements (Fig. 74). The beautifully made line-baskets of unpeeled [285] willow have the graceful curves that one associates with the work of untouched 'primitives' (Fig. 82). And the division of [462] labour was on a primitive level, for to the womenfolk fell the tedious labour of baiting and preparing the hooks. The long-line fishermen were exceptionally hardy and were regarded with awe and respect by the inshore fishermen-farmers. No doubt the timid and the weakly had been weeded out by continual stress. Their knowledge of the sea and of the fishing [423] marks was a guarded secret, and the best banks were some-[777] times allotted, no doubt to avoid fights, by casting lots. In the Hebrides this was done on Bride's Day. There also, and possibly in Ireland, the banks were held in rotation in a kind of marine rundale.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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OLD PISHROGUES

Old customs die hard in isolated islands and in the loneliness of ships at sea. Fishermen in the north to this day avoid direct mention of many words such as pig, priest and rat, and similar tabus are found among fishing communities as far away as Malaya, 'Formerly when starting on fishing expeditions the crews of Irish boats were very careful that their craft should leave the shore in a direction sunways, and even yet this superstition directs the course of many a fishing boat',[1] and, we may add, controls the casting of a net. A boat should always be entered on the right-hand side. In the kingdom of Mourne 'it was unlucky to be the third boat out on leaving harbour, and men would go to any lengths to avoid it, even tying two boats together so that there should be no third boat. On a Monday morning a fisherman will laughingly refuse to give you a light for your pipe, for he would be giving away his luck for the week. There were lucky and unlucky people to whom to sell fish, and it was the custom not to sell all the catch but to leave some fish in the boat. When a present of fish was made they were lifted backwards high over the head from the boat and not given straightforwardly. Nor would the old fishermen clean their boats until the end of the season, or even wipe the fish-scales from their boots. An unlucky boat would try to steal the luck of another boat by rubbing alongside it.'[2] The long-line fishermen of Carrickfergus would always spit on the first and last hook they baited, and in the mouth of the first fresh fish taken off the hook.[3] Superstitions attach also to fresh-water fish, especially to the sacred trout which, for the most part invisible, bring luck to pilgrims who catch a glimpse of them in certain holy wells.

Innumerable pishrogues concern the domesticated animals, and in particular cows and their milk and butter, which are peculiarly liable to supernatural influences. In the face of these unseen forces it is important that a new season or a new venture, or any operation carried out for the first time, should be begun with care and due ceremony, for special danger is attached to these occasions. Thus the first rich milk given by a

[1] Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 52.
[2] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 196.
[3] S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 260.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date)1910-12
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Upper Bunratty, the fields being covered with them, but, when it broke up, the "troops" dispersed, and no bands were seen at any distance from the rendezvous. A rat was "heard talking with the Devil" in the grave of an unpopular person before 1875, but how the holders of this curious conversation were identified was never stated. I have met a belief in speaking rats in eastern Clare and among fishermen at Kilkee.

Hedgehog.—This animal is reputed to steal apples and suck cows and eggs, so that it is persecuted and called *grainoge* (little ugly thing).

Birds.—A pair of ravens roosted in a top window of the round tower of Iniscatha (Scattery) early in the last century. The birds were said to escort their young, when fully fledged, across the Shannon to Carrigfoile Castle in Kerry, and not to let them return to the island.[15] Scaldcrows (roystons) are considered unlucky, and much feared. The old Irish regarded them as incarnations of the war-goddess Bodbh.[16] Birds as omens have already been noted.[17] The bat is looked on as a sort of bird, and it is ominous of death for it to fly at one's face. The entry of a robin into a house is a death omen near Tulla, but elsewhere a sign of good fortune. Although swans are so plentiful that I have often seen more than forty together in Inchiquin and other lakes, the only folklore associated with them seems to be a tale of swan-maidens at Inchiquin. The hunting of the wren has been described in Section XIV.[18]

Fishes.—It was regarded as a custom among the fishermen of Kilrush and Scattery that no one should go fishing for three days after the arrival of the herring shoals, but, when the first day dawned, a crowd of boats was always discovered, and much quarrelling resulted.[19] As the shoals arrived, a mass used to be celebrated on the shore at Kilmurry, Ibrickan, to secure good

[15] *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. xviii., p. 546.

[16] *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. x.; *Revue Celtique*, vol. i.; Joyce, *Social History of Ireland*, vol. i., p. 267.

[17] Vol. xxi., p. 190.

[18] *Ante*, pp. 206-7, and Plate IX.

[19] Hely Dutton, *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare* (1808), pp. 228, 259.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date)1910-12
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226 825 fishing and to keep off dogfishes and small sharks.[20] The reputed giant lake pikes and eels have already been mentioned.[21]

"*Worms.*"—Newts, lizards, and large caterpillars are included by the peasantry under this term. They are supposed to be very dangerous to both men and cattle, and are relentlessly destroyed. 825 Of late years I have even had difficulty in saving the pretty little grey lizards, now much rarer than when, over thirty years ago, they swarmed in Clare Abbey and other sunny and sheltered ruins. A colony of unfortunate little lizards in a hollow tree was reported to me as "a nest of adders." My informant[22] about the sacrifice on the dolmen of Maryfort,—the daughter of an old Peninsular veteran, living near Clonlara,—told me a circumstantial tale which was faintly remembered at Clonlara many years later. A "worm with legs" ran down a man's throat as he slept in a field, and he pined away, with an ever-increasing appetite, until he was persuaded to consult a "wise person." He was kept from drinking for two days by the expert, and then fed on bacon and taken to a stream. The patient's mouth was fastened open, and a freshly-toasted piece of bacon put near it. The thirsty "worm" heard the running water, and came out into the man's mouth, where it smelt the meat and sprang on it, fixing its claws in it. The "wise man" then threw the bacon into the water, and the man rapidly recovered. A similar story from near Tulla ended in the "worm" drinking and trying to jump back into the patient's mouth, but being killed by the doctor.[23] Children were told that, if they slept with their mouths open, "worms" (apparently caterpillars of the death's head or the puss moth in Inchiquin and central Clare) or

[20] Canon Dwyer, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 503, writes unsympathetically about this touching faith of the poor fishers.

[21] Vol. xxi., p. 480. [22] Mrs. Elias Egan; see *ante*, p. 31.

[23] I have heard an almost identical story told among my mother's relatives as happening in Lancashire. [The belief in "animals in people's insides" is almost universal in the British Isles; for examples see *N. & Q.*, 1st S., vol. vi., pp. 221, 338, 466, vol. ix., pp. 29, 84, 276, 323; 6th S., vol. i., pp. 311, 392; 9th S., vol. vii., pp. 222, 332, 390, vol. viii., pp. 89, 346, vol. xi., p. 467, vol. xii., pp. 414, 471; *Folk-Lore*, vol. x., p. 251; *British Medical Journal*, 1906; and many newspaper paragraphs, such as one in *Morning Leader*, June 3, 1908. I have heard the tale told in London with a large community of cockroaches as the tenants.—Ed.]

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

tudes and practices; for the islanders do not wish to jeopardize unemployment assistance and old age benefits, nor to be taxed in the future, and thus closely guard sources and amounts of income, even from relatives and friends.

Division of Labor

The division of labor between the sexes is more dichotomous today than it was at the turn of the century, when there was an extensive sharing of the same tasks by men and women. The latter now restrict their economic activities to the home, for the most part, especially if they must care for infants and young children. As soon as children can speak and walk, they help their mothers perform household chores and run errands, such as carrying messages and procuring groceries in the shops. But at age seven, following First Communion, boys spend less time with their mothers and come to take on small jobs which throw them more and more into contact with their older brothers, their fathers, and other men of the island. By the time young adolescents pass Confirmation and leave school, at the time of puberty, they are able to perform most adult economic tasks, and their labor is of utmost importance to the family.

Among the major jobs performed by women outside of the household round, and these by only a few younger women, are cleaning fish, carrying seaweed, planting potatoes, haying, growing vegetables, feeding and milking cattle, and caring for poultry. They also knit, crochet, ready wool for weaving, and tailor clothes for themselves and their families, as well as make sweaters, belts, and shawls for sale. In the several homes which accommodate tourists during the summer months, most of the responsibilities for their care fall on the women of the household. Men also do the tasks associated with fishing, farming, and the care of large livestock just listed, and they participate in the job of thickening wool; all of the other subsistence and income activities are exclusively male ones.

In the past, when fishing was a more practiced and laborious occupation than it is now, women not only aided men gut and cure fish, but they baited lines and did other affiliated chores as well. They also participated to a greater degree than today in collecting seaweed and in planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops of all varieties. Their involvement in the economic life of the island often demanded that they transport heavy loads manually for long distances, especially when they cared for all of the needs of both large and small livestock and aided in kelp-making. It is not difficult to comprehend why women are mystified at the complaints of their single daughters about the hardships that young married women must endure.

Most folk admit that members of the present generation work less strenuously than did those of two generations ago, when harsh landlords rather than a benevolent government intruded so importantly into their lives. There is in Inis Beag a widespread feeling of guilt among men, seldom expressed openly, about being "lazy." It is my observation that island men, on the whole, put in fewer hours of labor and expend less energy than workers in a typical industrial plant in America. Inis Beag emigrants who return from England for visits invariably

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size from fourths to quarter-acres, located along the quarter that his community fronts. As a result of past inheritance and purchase, however, five Castle villagers own plots in one or two other quarters, as do five High and two Low villagers. Before field building commenced, the most extensive and fertile soils were found on the terraces; shallow and less widespread soils were situated just south of the terrace crest, while the back of the island was, and still is, mostly limestone pavement. Landholders originally were assigned equal acreage in each of these three areas, so that no one would have an advantage over his neighbors, and this pattern still predominates. The quarters are separated from one another by high, thick stone fences which run almost the length of Inis Beag, and, from west to east, they are known as Quarter of the *Phoillín* (derivation unknown), Quarter of the Ridge of Huts (after an ancient *clochán* settlement behind High Village), Quarter of the Castle, and Quarter of the Lake; they embrace, respectively, 271, 261, 240, and 263 acres.

Fifty-nine of the 71 householders in Inis Beag hold or own land, and one of these is an absentee holder. If an individual possesses four or fewer acres, he is regarded as landless—"a man of few gardens"—and 11 men are so designated. Two as yet unresolved disputes over the possession of land when resolved will add two other householders to the landless category, unless the property is divided in some manner among all four litigants by the Irish Land Commission. The folk prefer to rent rather than to own land, so that the commission will supervise matters relating to inheritance "fairly" and with little cost to the litigants should a dispute arise. The average sized Inis Beag holding is 15.7 acres, or approximately a croggery, and 25 islanders hold this amount of land; in addition, one person has 40 acres, three 32 acres, one 28 acres, eight 24 acres, eight 20 acres, four 12 acres, and nine 8 acres. Below is a chart summing up ownership data by village:

	Landholders and Owners	*Landless Householders*	*Average Sized Holding (in acres)*
Low Village	17	9	11.0
High Village	14	1	18.2
Castle Village	15	2	19.0
Terrace Village	13	1	16.4

The disproportionate number of landless persons in Low are, for the most part, either descendants of fisherfolk who centered in that community in earlier times and did not possess land, or siblings of landholders who chose not to emigrate. They support themselves by craft work, keeping tourists, fishing, managing shops, and working for the government, among other pursuits.

Farming

There is neither legendary nor historical evidence of when soil building commenced in Inis Beag, but the process is an archaic one and is practiced in other communities along the Atlantic seaboard where appropriate seaweeds are available. Today, between 45 and 50 percent of the land surface of the island is

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Figure 8. Transporting hay to an outbuilding

249 Those islanders who dwell in thatched houses or who own other buildings which are thatched grow rye, as do a few farmers who use it as fodder. It is planted in recently dug potato fields at the same time as grass and is ready for harvesting the next August. Rye for thatching is pulled rather than cut, and compressed into [342] small bundles which are propped against fences for drying. Pulling is preferred because grass and weeds can be separated out, and the roots will furnish friction [343] to keep the bundles from slipping when they are placed on the roof later. After drying, the bundles are carried to barns or outbuildings to be flailed, winnowed, and stored until used a month or two afterward. Flailing is done by striking the tops of the bundled plants against a stone placed a foot from an indoor wall, in such a way that the seeds are separated and collected at the base of the wall. Later the grain is spread on a flagging and winnowed by allowing handfuls of seed to [246] fall to the rock surface so that wind blows away the chaff. Rye used as fodder is planted with grass and cut when "green" at the same time that hay is cut, and is handled in almost the same way as the latter.

Care of Livestock

175 The export of fish, kelp, pigs, cattle, and sheep accounted for 90 percent
434 of the income of Inis Beag folk in 1893, as reported by the Congested Districts
437 Board. The sale of cattle and sheep ranked last, for at that time indigenous soils
[311] were not adequate either in extent or grass yield to support many livestock, and
178 fields on the terraces were used mostly for farming. But over the past 70 years
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kelp-making has disappeared, pig rearing has been abandoned, and fishing has become mainly a subsistence pursuit engaged in by only a small number of islanders. Hand in glove with these developments came the enlargement of arable lands and hence an increase in good pasturage, first necessitated by the intrusion of the eelworm and then stimulated by government agricultural supports. Farming became a more time consuming and lucrative occupation, as did the breeding and fattening of cattle and sheep for export, and the keeping of horses and asses expanded to accommodate the increased emphasis on farming. Thus, while the subsistence economy changed but slightly in two generations, the money economy experienced a radical alteration.

At the present time, 59 householders own one or more cattle; 56, one or more sheep; 22, one or more horses; and 58, one or more asses, among whom 8 have 2 asses and 1 a jennet. The government regulates the breeding of both cattle and horses, with the result that only one man is licensed to own a bull and the horses are mares or geldings. Cows are serviced for a 1 pound stud fee in the most inaccessible of fields, where children and tourists cannot observe the breeding of the "beasts." Most of the asses, just as the bulls and stallions, are castrated, but in this case to prevent them from kicking down fences and braying excessively when sexually aroused. Whereas almost all of the horses and asses and a few cattle have been imported from the mainland, the sheep population is Inis Beag sired. For the most part, cattle are grazed on fallowing plots, the few goats on crags at the back of the island, and other livestock on indigenous pasturage.

Cattle owners usually possess a "milch cow," a yearling, and a calf, and cows and bullocks are sold at two years of age. When a milch cow becomes old and "dried up," it either is fattened and sold or, if the price on the mainland is low, butchered and eaten by the householder and his family, usually between Allhallows and Christmas. "Cattle jobbers" visit the island to purchase cows and bullocks, and in 1960 they were paying between 60 and 80 pounds per beast. Excitement prevails on the strand on days when cattle are shipped off. Each struggling animal is pushed out into the sea by a group of men and then pulled to a canoe by a rope attached around its neck; its head is held over the stern transom of the *curach* for the trip to the steamer, where it is hoisted from the water and swung high over the deck and into a hold. Sometimes an islander is forced by circumstances to import a calf, and in 1960 the purchase price of calves at the fair in a nearby port was approximately 20 pounds; a colt cost about 50 pounds and an ass 5.

Probably the most striking difference between cattle rearing on the mainland and in Inis Beag is that island cows are not stabled, but forage and are milked throughout the year in the fields. Between November and March, they are pastured south of the terrace crest on fallowing and the more luxuriant of the indigenous plots, fed hay and rye carried to them from barns and outbuildings, and watered by bucket from neighboring springs which are swollen from winter rains. Men and boys care for their needs during this period, and often spend as many as three hours walking out and back to the pastures twice each day. With the coming of spring, cows are moved to fields on the terraces where women and children can feed and milk them, or men, who are now entering on the busy agricultural and

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household. Some cats have reverted to a wild state and roam the back of the island, sheep occasionally are killed by hungry dogs, and young people will entertain themselves by baiting dogs to fight. By and large, animals, especially asses, in Inis Beag are treated roughly or with indifference.

Fishing

It is estimated that between 30 and 50 three-men crews from Inis Beag fished regularly almost the year around at the beginning of the century. At that time there were ten families of fisherfolk—six in Low Village, two in High, and one each in the other two communities—who subsisted mainly on money obtained from the sale of their catches or by bartering fish for needed goods and services. Only farming and kelp-making intermittently interfered with the fishing regime of landholders, and fishing ceased altogether only for parts of December and January, when inclement weather and the Christmas season intruded. Women and children were deeply involved in the fishing endeavor, just as they were in farming and livestock rearing, to free their menfolk for fishing. Crews ranged the coast of Inis Beag and neighboring islands, the two sounds, the mainland coast for 20 miles, and Atlantic shallows 5 to 8 miles offshore. Lines 40 fathoms in length were "shot" for ling and cod, and nets over a mile in length were drifted to ensnare spring mackerel. At times when fish were particularly abundant, fishermen would be out daily for a week or two, arising long before dawn to have their lines down before daybreak, and returning home as late as midnight.

Sixty years later, a sharply contrasting situation prevails, wherein not only has the exporting of fish almost been discontinued, but fish no longer rank as a major staple in the diet of the folk and are not even eaten several months of the year. Nine three-men crews fished fairly regularly with nets and lines between February and October of 1960 and exported or sold locally part of their catches, and two crews fished for lobsters. Fishing now is carried on within a mile of the island, and only one crew ventured as far as the mainland in 1960. It was customary in the past for crews to fish for two consecutive days off a mainland peninsula and sleep overnight in their canoes or lodge in a village there, a venture which required over 30 miles of backbreaking labor at the oars. Line fishing today is done in shallow waters, only short nets are employed, and the men do not care to spend long hours at their task. Elders bemoan the present state of affairs for several reasons, one of them being the loss of fishing lore accumulated over the centuries —knowledge of the ocean floor, of deep currents, of the habitats and movements of fish, not to mention knowledge relating to the manufacture and care of fishing gear and fishing techniques themselves.

Most important of the factors which gradually have restricted fishing are the actions of foreign trawlers—particularly Spanish and French ones, the shift of migratory routes of fish, and long range changes in the weather. During the 1890s, foreign trawlers commenced to fish the waters surrounding Inis Beag, and in the decades since they have increased in number and have fished ever closer to the coast, until now they often penetrate within the legal limit. Not only have

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Figure 9. Launching a curach *from the strand in stormy weather*

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they taken fish which eventually would have found their way into island nets, but they have destroyed with their trawls spawning beds of certain fish and captured lines and nets set out many miles in the ocean by Inis Beag crews. Another reason why fish have become scarce is that shifting currents or other related factors have caused some fish, especially mackerel, to bypass the region. Other coastal areas of Ireland from which fish seldom were taken in quantity in the past now are thriving, and some islanders look hopefully to the future when once again migratory routes will change and bring the fish back. However, even if fish were more available today, it would be difficult to fish for them from *curach* for part of the year because of worsening weather conditions. Storms have increased in number and severity during the winters, and even the summers which once were relatively "calm" are punctuated with long spells of "rough" weather which makes going out in the canoes risky (see Fig. 9). Finally, a seldom admitted factor also must be considered—the indolence of the men. Aged fishermen assert that sufficient fish are still available to make serious fishing a highly profitable occupation, but that young men have been "spoiled" by government benevolence and are unwilling to undergo the hardships entailed—"Why rise before dawn and row all day when you can draw the dole?" During 1959, those crews which fished the most averaged between 50 and 60 pounds per man for the season.

Whereas the efforts of the Irish Free State and the Republic to improve Inis Beag living standards have been directed mostly toward stimulating agriculture and animal husbandry, those of the government before 1922 were focused on making fishing a more productive enterprise. The Congested Districts Board intro-

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duced trawlers and other types of fishing vessels and financed their purchase by islanders of the region, sent instructors to teach fishermen how to use the new boats and gear, set up curing and storage facilities in the islands, facilitated the shipping of fish to mainland markets, and attempted to regulate these markets so as to ensure maximum profits for the folk. These efforts failed for the most part in Inis Beag, and today the men fish from *curach*, much as did their grandfathers. The continuing effort of the government to improve fishing in the area is reflected in instruction in modern fishing techniques at a school in a nearby island, and the successful operation of a number of government financed trawlers and other fishing boats from there.

The islanders consider fish from the sea, which are netted, more palatable and healthier to eat than those caught with lines and trawls, fresh water fish, and fish which have been cured or frozen. Fish taken on lines, because they bleed, and those enmeshed in trawls, because they suffocate, are thought to suffer in taste and nourishment, as do those which are treated artificially for sale; and fresh water fish are believed to be unhealthy to eat because they feed on refuse thrown into lakes and rivers rather than on natural foods. Some folk exclude even mackerel from their diet, since these fish "swim on the surface and eat everything dirty afloat." We already have noted that Inis Beag elders prefer seaweed to chemical fertilizers; the preference for netted fish which feed on natural foods to fresh water fish and mackerel which are contaminated is another example of a recurrent cultural theme—the positive valuation of natural objects and the negative valuation of artificial ones which come in contact with the human body. Other manifestations of this theme are the emphasis placed on folk medicines and the distrust of medicines prescribed by nurse and doctor, the belief that certain foods will assure health and combat specific illnesses, and the fear of piped water and canned foods. I often was told that I could improve my eyesight by giving up my glasses and rubbing dew on my eyelids, or by walking along the seashore to allow the wind and spray to penetrate my eyeballs.

Over 30 varieties of fish are caught off Inis Beag, some with lines of varying length and number of hooks, others in the four types of nets, and a few with both lines and nets. Most important of the fish are: ling, cod, bream, gurnet, haddock, and autumn mackerel caught with lines; plaice, turbot, rock fish, and pollack both netted and taken on lines; and herring and spring mackerel captured in special nets. Trammel and drag nets are used in addition to herring and mackerel nets, and the most commonly used baits are gurnet, haddock, conger eel, bream, herring, and limpets. Fishing techniques vary considerably, as do the times of the year when particular kinds of fish are available, the localities that they frequent, and the baits which are most effective for each variety. Fishing crews form at different times of the year, often to fish in certain areas for specific fish. They are composed of both kin and close friends, and they tend to alter in membership from year to year as other activities intrude.

Before I leave the subject of fishing, I wish to correct three commonly held misconceptions concerning Inis Beag men: they are all skilled seamen; because they spend much of their time at sea they are of necessity able swimmers; and

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many of them have lost their lives to the ocean. Islanders are well aware of the wide differences in rowing and fishing abilities among themselves, and the evaluation of the skills of various men, past and present, is a much heard subject of conversation. Also, many men choose not to fish because they are unable to develop the requisite talents, are prone to severe seasickness, or are overly wary of the dangers associated with fishing. It seems reasonable to assume that people who spend so much time on the water as a matter of safety will have learned to swim, but I was unable to discover a single islander who possesses this skill. The reasons put forward to account for the fact are several, but the most significant one never is broached—the puritanical reluctance to bare the body either publicly or privately at any age. Folk rationalizations are best summed up in the following quotations: "Nothing will happen to the man who knows the sea.", "Better for a man to drown at once and save himself the suffering.", "The man who can't swim will take more care.", and "When death is on a man, he can't be saved."

A recurring motif in writings about Inis Beag is the threatening sea and heavy loss of life among fishermen, with its attendant psychological depression. In the past century, only four sea accidents have occurred in the island with the loss of but 12 lives. The folk are extremely cautious out of respect for the elements, handle their canoes with remarkable dexterity, and are excellent weather forecasters. The claim of one famous writer that each family has lost male members to the ocean reflects not only his psychological outlook, but the breadth and depth of kinship reckoning and the high degree of inbreeding—as an islander told me, "Every Inis Beag family is related, and the drowned man might have been eight-of-kin (third cousin) who died 60 years ago." The motif can be attributed to the projection of a tragic world view into the interpretation of the local culture by some authors, to the nativistic and primitivistic biases of other writers, and to a common sense conclusion reached by observers who have spent little time in the island and have failed to "count noses."

Diet

The diet of the islanders is simple, and only one large meal is eaten during the day. After the turf fire is rekindled from coals and water is boiled for tea, the family assembles for a breakfast which includes bread spread with butter and jam and tea mixed with ample amounts of milk and sugar. Dinner at noon and lunches in the late afternoon and before retiring at night feature the same ingredients, although a boiled or fried egg usually is added to the dinner menu. The supper, eaten between seven and eight o'clock in the summer and an hour or two earlier during the winter, is the main meal when the family once again is united, and at this time boiled potatoes and vegetables, and meat if available, dominate the menu. Again bread and tea are served, and a dessert, or "sweet"—such as custard, rhubarb, blancmange, or biscuits—may be added. Children of school age in a family eat together at noon and after school and may be joined by their father, but his duties often absent him from one or both of these meals, and he may carry bread and tea

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Celts. But local legend, historical evidence, and genealogical data collected by my wife and me indicate that the present population is descended from immigrants who came to the island from many parts of Ireland following the Cromwellian incursion of the seventeenth century. The islanders still express bitterness over conditions of poverty and servitude experienced by their ancestors during the 300 years that they lived under absentee Anglo-Irish landlords. All of the excesses of foreign domination suffered by mainland peasants were suffered by the inhabitants of Inis Beag, but were aggravated by the ordinary hardships of island living. Little was known about events in Inis Beag during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries until the island was visited by archeologists and publicized in their scientific writings. The surrounding area of the mainland was very much isolated and seldom visited at that time, although trading between Inis Beag and nearby communities was carried on, and passing ships sometimes called at the island.

Agricultural pursuits have always dominated the subsistence economy of Inis Beag. Most householders own land on which they grow potatoes and other vegetables, grass, and sometimes rye and sally rods and where they pasture cattle, sheep, goats, asses, and horses. The back of the island, behind the communities, is divided into four strips, and each landowner possesses numerous plots located along the "quarter" on which his village fronts. The average combined holding is sixteen acres, and almost 50 percent of the land is composed of arable indigenous and manufactured soils. Potatoes are the staple crop, and they are supplemented by various other vegetables, milk from cattle and goats, meat from island sheep, fish, eggs, and other foods, many of which are imported and sold in the shops. Rye is grown for thatching, and sally rods are used to weave several types of containers. Other subsistence activities (which also provide income for some folk) are knitting, weaving, crocheting, tailoring, and sandal making.

A slowly expanding cash economy features the export of cattle and sheep fattened on the island and of surplus potatoes and fish, the collection of seaweed for extraction of iodine at a mainland factory, the keeping of tourists in private homes, and the manufacturing of craft objects for sale to visitors and for export. At the turn of the century, fishing from canoes—with nets and lines often many miles out in the ocean—was an important subsistence and income activity. A few islanders who owned little or no land lived primarily by fishing and kelp-making. But over the past few decades, fish have become less plentiful and the weather more inclement, especially during winter

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226 months; less than a dozen crews now fish regularly, and most fish are consumed locally rather than exported. Government subsidies of many
434 sorts and remittances from relatives who have emigrated supplement the
657 cash economy. The government further aids the islanders by not collect-
[651] ing "rates" and by setting low rents on land. Income information is as
12 difficult to come by as data on sex, disputes, and pagan religious retentions; since the people do not wish to jeopardize their unemployment benefits (most of them receive the "dole") and old age pensions and fear taxation in the future, they are secretive about sources and amounts of income.

626 More important than the formal political structure of Inis Beag are the local informal system and social control techniques of gossip,
674 ridicule, satire, and the like. Crime is rare in Inis Beag, and there are no "guards" stationed there. The island is seldom visited by politicians,
829 and many inhabitants are either apathetic or antagonistic toward the
641 county and national governments. Those asked to account for their
[66] antigovernment attitude cite widespread nepotism and corruption among officials, the slight differences between the platforms of the two major parties, and "foolish" government schemes in Inis Beag—usually instituted without consulting the islanders. Government aid is sought and
[657] even expected as a "right," but it is seldom considered adequate. Tax-
[746] ation in any form, especially of tobacco and stout, is bitterly opposed.

626 The informal political system is dominated by the curate, the
793 "headmaster" of the national school, and a self-appointed local "king."
[875] In the past, the amount of influence exerted by curates has varied; some
[624] have been concerned mostly with fulfilling spiritual responsibilities, while others have attacked by sermon, threat, and even physical action such activities as courting, dancing, visiting, gossiping, and drinking
793 spirits. Anticlerical sentiment (seldom manifested in overt acts) is as
829 strong as, or stronger than, its antigovernment counterpart. The clergy are said to interfere too much in secular affairs, to live too "comfortably," to be absent from the island too often, and to act overly aloof and
[626] supercilious. The most outspoken anticlerics assert that curates have employed informers, allocated indulgences, withheld the sacraments, and placed curses ("reading the Bible at") in their efforts to regulate the
875 secular life of Inis Beag. The headmaster, appointed and rigidly super-
571 vised by the parish priest and curate, presides over social events and serves as an adviser to the islanders in many matters, in addition to carrying out his official duties.

571 Inis Beag lacks a class system, and the status symbols which affect